

CONVERSATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND CURATOR

Thursday, MAY 25th, 2006

Yasmeen: There is an epic quality to each of your portrayals and treatments of the landscape. Marie began the series *ERRANCES* in Wadi-Rum; a bolt of desert familiar since its use in the classic film *Lawrence of Arabia*. This is the first site of five that compose the series. Like a traveling salesman, Kim parks *Trailer Park* in Lt. Petrosino Square in New York City before driving her mobile home that contains a living garden across country, stopping along the way to position the trailer's planted landscape in new contexts. Linda creates representations of the ideal city and the smoke stacks in Long Island City. She also represents childhood memories within the format of the carpet. This format has long been used for telling stories, and describing historical events and geographies. These are epic landscapes that arguably operate very differently. Marie captures them, while Kim and Linda subvert their form. What is it about an epic landscape that you think the others are driving at?

Kim: In all I see a desire on the part of the artists to see the landscape they choose, rather than perhaps, *what is*. In mine and Linda's case, we re-see the landscape as fantastical and even Utopian. In Marie's work it is in how she is seeing what is there, it is in her perspective...but there is still a fair amount of the fantastical. If the Utopia exists, it is in its sentimentality (in the positive sense) and the way the subject matter is looked at—with fair amounts of awe and respect...and even "magic". Perhaps better put, if Linda re-creates the landscape, then I re-see the landscape based on placement, context and juxtaposition (but in literal terms do not create anything new, as Linda does), and Marie re-envisions: her new creation exists by the way she sees, not by what she creates (Linda) or by *forcible juxtaposition* (Kim). In this way, each of our approaches is unique; our visions occupy different spaces, and converse across conceptual geographies, while working in some form or another with literal geographies.

I think what unites our work and gives the *epic* quality that Yasmeen so graciously termed it, is that in all of us, in one way or another we are creating, sewing, pulling, coaxing, seducing, or manifesting the sub-line from the mundane. I feel this is one of the major threads, the separate power in each of our works, and the unifying *feeling* throughout our works as a whole. How we all achieve this is by connecting to the outer world around us, physically and conceptually. Perhaps after that initial "gathering" of material from the outside world, it is then filtered through us internally—either by thought, by eye, or by concept—and then our final representations thereby become, "epic portrayals and treatments of the landscape".

Linda: I think Kim, you do a good job of drawing some basic distinctions and connections in our treatment of landscape. I think the idea of aiming to bring out the sublime from the mundane is particularly resonant, as it lies in with the idea of Utopia, the search for something beyond and better than the everyday.

When I first read Yasmeen's text about the epic quality, I was struck by the monumentality of each of our projects. In Marie's large-scale photographs, I'm impressed by the vast spaces that she captures, spaces that dwarf any inhabitants. Kim's reordering of interior/exterior natural and domestic spaces within her own trailer is a huge undertaking, and the fact that she is going on tour—out to conquer the American landscape (Wow! That's awesome, Kim, I don't know you were doing this). My sculptures, in their scale, plethora of details, and labor-intensive-ness, also suggest something epic (I hope).

That being said, I think there is also an intimate quality in all our work, so, an attention to the minute, the details—something that pulls the viewer in. In addition to vast, awe-inspiring landscapes, Marie also acquaints us with how the nomadic set up their domestic space—the pots and pans neatly arranged and hung in the tent, or the sink set into the stone. Kim brings us into an enclosed space that is fastidiously (I assume) manicured and cared for. In my work, the monumental is composed of hundreds of miniature forms that draw the viewer in.

[By the way, Kim, do you have any pictures of the interior that you could send me, or a URL?]

Friday, MAY 26th, 2006

Kim: Here there are, here is a teaser... Also, I won't be going "cross country," but will be going on tour to schools throughout NY, with the help of a public school arts teacher who I have worked with before (I want to work with kids and open areas of discussion and thinking about biology, ecology, art, public art, discourse, mechanics, social statements, environmentalism).

My further thinking: Our approach to how we deal with space, its physicality and geography, is so very different and so intriguing.

Linda sits, and with her mind and her hands creates vast three dimensional and yes, *epic*, landscapes that one disappears into via the mind and eye, not the body (which in this series is much larger than my work. Hers reads as cities upon cities). Which leads me to think the "landscape in her mind" is even vaster, even more *epic* than what makes it out into sculpture.

I move non-stop around and around in a limited yet active physical space, creating a place that the viewer physically moves through with their body. (Though mine is the most physical and the largest dimensionally, it is also the most contained, and in a way is not nearly as vast as either Linda's or Marie's)

Marie goes further than us all, literally, by having to actually take her body over vast distances to get, record, and bring back the physical spaces, landscapes, and geographies that we see. In essence, her work is the largest of all, even though her physical work is the "smallest" dimensionally of the three of us, as it incorporates thousands of miles and vast psychological distances.

Yasmeen: You have both addressed the subjects of scale and spatiality, how these physical attributes weave our perceptions of the objects being presented, and the way we relate to them. What I find most striking is how Kim is able to evoke Linda's observations about the physicality of her work and the expansive quality of Marie's landscape photography, to point out different aspects. I'm curious to hear more about the scale of what you represent and the scale of your representations. What is it about gutting a trailer and planting it? Plants have a quality that is, ideally, infinite, in that they regenerate. Barring catastrophe, plants and humans insist and continue to reproduce. This is very different than the trailer that is constructed, with what is essentially an edition number. In other words, we make only so many widgets. Now, what I find completely confusing is that Linda's sculpted cities are composed of made forms, out of polymer and hot-gue that feel as if they are reproducing. Might that be because they have an anthropomorphic quality?

Marie: I'd first like to make one more point about another dimension of the word "*epic*", since the conversation turns around this word. It's the idea that there is a story/poem told TO SOMEONE through it, and I think it is important not only to see how WE are TELLING the story, but also to include the audience—the viewer—the person we are talking to through our works. After all, work is not just related to us (through body or mind experiences and re-creating/envisioning/seeing) but also to those we want to be in conversation with (hence Kim's school-tour for instance, and the political premise in my pictures).

All of us are physically using the landscape in its materiality to try and approach something personal/emotional/sublime in its materiality. As I guess in the way almost everything in art attempts to do. I also mean to think about HOW we want our interlocutor to EXPERIENCE our work. At the first pass, you relate to the work in a certain physical way. For example, with Kim's work it is by BEING in it; Linda by TOUCH (tactility of the work); and myself by VIEW, seeing the landscape. The second aspect of understanding is translated through their imagination. The other point being WHAT is the message we want to convey. I believe mine is about *relativity* (of lifestyles, values, judgment) >> questioning and re-evaluating very basic things (we most people) take for granted, like what is HOME and the sedentary way of life that accompanies it.

Kim: Yes, yes, yes, in all our work, we place the viewer INSIDE our works, all in different ways, but this is the objective or at least if not the objective, it is, I think the outcome. I get lost inside of both Marie's and Linda's work, either by standing in front of Marie's visions, which are so real and so spatial one can enter them by being in front of them, or by losing myself inside Linda's creations because there is so much rendered, so many planes, so much square footage in the levels and sides and in the rising of the objects, I can wind down into them...me as the viewer...I am drawn very much inside of both of your works, and in my case, the viewer is also drawn inside, by definition.

And what do we convey??? I think that is why there is much that is social, observational. I also know there is something personal in the work that is communicating, that people latch onto, that they connect with, because with all, though we show no people, everything we have made is still based on the human, and the human form, how it sees, moves, lives, it's everyday objects, the placement, the shapes, what the human sees, all of the human details that tell us a human has been there or is "of that," even if not pictured directly. The benches alone in my work evoke the public, and people. Marie's photos, that last ones I saw, screamed of people in detail, though they were devoid of them. In Linda's work, because she hand-makes everything, I can practically feel her personhood through her work because of the multitude and sheer colossalness of the handmade aspect of her work.

My work can be read as idealized, "naturalized" models of cities—urban landscapes that have been put through an organic filter. I think it's interesting how a lot of utopian, futuristic architecture and design emphasizes organic forms. Does this represent a longing to return to nature, to these primal, sensual masses, away from the modernist grid and its steely sharp edges? For me, these forms are a way of connecting with impressions, memories, experiences, translating these thoughts into a physical form that I hope will resonate with the viewer.

Hope you are enjoying your weekend...

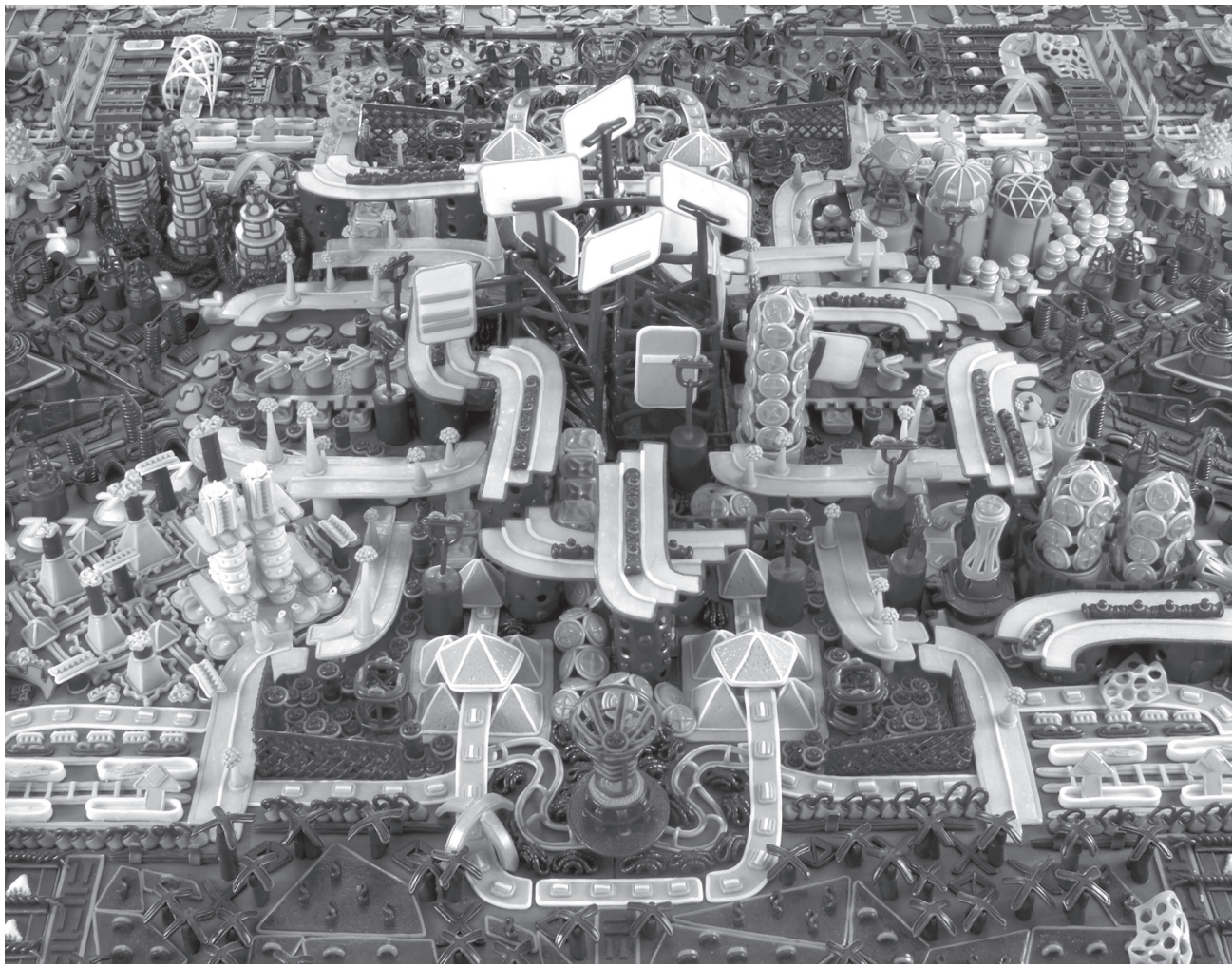
Saturday, MAY 27th, 2006

Linda: I think it's interesting what Kim says about the implied human presence in all of our work, something I hadn't considered before. But I want to come back to "the social and observational" and how this reads in our work. I keep thinking about the theme of nature. I will comment on how I see this theme playing out in your work and in mine. Feel free to add on, clarify, disagree.

Marie's work suggests to me how vulnerable and insignificant human life is compared to the massiveness of nature. Despite our hubris in building and shaping our environment, ultimately our fate is to be engulfed by nature. The inhabitants, whose dwellings and possessions she photographs, seem more in tune with this reality. Though there is a poignant effort to set up home, with some trappings that seem permanent (the wooden porch added to the trailer, the sink set into the cliff), there is also the sense of the temporariness, the possibility of movement.



TOP to BOTTOM
Linda Ganjin, *It Must Have Been a Happy Time* (2004)
Linda Ganjin, *L.I.C. (Lovely Infrastructure Capriccio)* (2005), detail
Kim Holleran, *Trailer Park* (2005), exterior view



Kim's work makes me think about our desire to tame and possess nature. There is the ironic element of bringing "the outdoors" indoors, in light of the devastation that we've wrought on our environment, partly through the use of motor vehicles, like an RV. There is something bittersweet about this desire to create a kind of natural paradise for ourselves that can travel with us. It scares me in a way, not only that we are not relating to nature in its authentic form, but the idea that eventually this may be what is left of the natural world—little bits and pieces that are privately owned.

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Yasmeen: Linda has pointed to striking qualities in the relationship between the human and the environment/nature. She hinted at the role played by the structures humans build. What I am curious to learn more about is how each of you approach the built environment and how you yourselves build environments? I am going beyond scale and materiality towards the question of a typology. You are dealing with representations of built environments. Kim's *Trailer Park* is in fact a built, inhabitable environment (for worms, lady bugs, plants and transient humans). But Marie and Linda, you are dealing with pure representation. What I would like to explore is how the typologies of nomadic life permeate your thinking about the built environment? And more importantly, how does this thinking influence and sculpt your representations of nomadic structures? Does my preoccupation with locating patterns in design and form, and even signification resonate with the way you create forms and the way you see the others creating forms?



TOP
Marie Sauvêtre, # 5 Nègre, Israel (2006)
MIDDLE LEFT to RIGHT
Marie Sauvêtre, #3 Wadi Rum, Jordan (2004)
#17 Slab City CA, United States (2005)
#10 Catalina NY, United States (2005)



Friday, JUNE 2nd, 2006

Marie: What is the link between topology and photography? Photography has a long tradition of being used in a somehow scientific way for typologies (explorers' photographs that have been used for the past two centuries to portray indigenous people in foreign countries; scientists or social photographers who study the human race or a specific society, like August Sander in pre WWII Germany; or for critiquing the evolution of society, for instance the New Topographics and the development of the American landscape into suburbia; and the Bechers more recently, as I previously mentioned).

My relation/reaction to the typology >>> I am not doing a typology per se, the images are all composed differently (they are not a same straight on view, same angle, same proportions, same distance from the subject, same exposure, etc.). However, I do borrow from this systematic approach to image making, by the explorers, going to far off places to shoot them, and also by including some similar shots of different places. But I feel that the term typology implies something cold, mechanical, almost mathematical, and this is what I am going against: I DO want to, and insist on, including atmospheric, romantic, and naïve elements and feelings in my pictures. I guess I agree to work with the "exploratory" aspect of typology because photographers take photographs to try to understand and explain their own vision of the world. As for the prints size/frame, I admit that going for large prints makes them less emotional, but I'm not adamant about this choice—I might make very small intimate prints of the same images in another context.

I will not talk about Linda's and Kim's work as we are talking about choices. Thanks! Enjoy the rain girls!

Yasmeen: Through this conversation I've been reminded of many of the reasons for organizing *PORTABLE* (a title which comes directly from Kim). I had been following Kim and Linda's work for a couple of years. It was Marie's visit to Storefront, portfolio in hand, that clinched the exhibition concept. Her views of nomadic architectures, sprawled across the table, immediately triggered visual memories of Linda's carpets and Kim's trailer (which at that point in time was in the form of a model, drawings, and lively conversation).

Marie described *ERRANCE*, the title of her photography project, a word that in French means "between wandering and exile." We talked about conceptions of place and home and the possibilities of geographies, cities, and architectures as empathetic, inviting, inhabitable, and occupiable. At that point her photographic series included: Slab City, Wadi Rum, and Beauduc. Her process—locating nomadic architectures, and going to them to photograph them—appeals to my desire to catalogue. But beneath the surface of the generative power of typologies, lie serious intellectual and political engagements that stretch far beyond the formal aspects that I have concentrated on drawing out in this conversation.

Within Marie's series of ten photographs are references to Bedouins in Jordan and their cousins in Israel. The orange flags that trace the horizon of the Negev, weaving through hydro-lines, allude to one of Israel's most charged decisions, the dismantling of settlements in Gaza this year. The frontal view of a white wood trailer with violet trim describes the life of a community of originally Danish Jews, who have been moving throughout Europe and have now been in Israel for six years. Views of a trailer at the beach in Beauduc is taken during an annual Gypsy festival. On August 15th, 2005 the Gypsies met there for the annual festival St. Marie in Mer. They have now been forced off this land by the government, who claims they must leave for environmental reasons. This image recalls Marie's own family history, as a woman from France, with Gypsy relatives through marriage.

These images beg the question, what space is there for nomads now? Do they even really exist anymore as people who survive, eat and sleep, outside official economic systems. And if "nomad" is being redefined, what is happening to the shape of their houses. Can a person who lives in a tent, but works for the post-office, be a "nomad"?

The imagery Linda draws from is a complex mix of urban and popular cultural references. Her Lego-like cityscapes of *L.I.C.* and the candy-toned field of *It Must Have Been a Happy Time* have a perverse quality in their coloration and form. The saccharine pastels of youth used in *It Must Have Been a Happy Time*, inject legibility into the individual forms that themselves are rather ambiguous. Among the multitudes of little forms that comprise this sculpture are some that have an unsettling quality. The combination of childhood evoked through color, and the lightness of this massing, is shaken by forms that recall intestines and tongues sticking out. These sexual, bodily references create an amount of tension that opens the work to thoughts about childhood fixations and fascination with bodily processes. *L.I.C.* is made of forms that look as if they are struggling to resist collapsing or melting into their bases that are built according to standard structures (typologies). I find historical and temporal markers in her palette that, in the case of *L.I.C.*, has a distinctly 1970s mustard undertone. While *Garden of Delight's* gleefulness immediately recalls fantasy and possibility, it is Linda's hope that presenting the three sculptures together will allow a more layered reading, and suggest a deeper look, to reveal aspects beyond the basic choices of color and form, to breakdown where and when fantasy and reality occur.

In the work displayed, Utopias are conjured at the intersection of actuality and possibility. With *Trailer Park*, Kim realizes a utopian project, in the form of public art. Kim's making of a real live movable public garden is in its success and possibility unsettling. At a 1:1 scale, Kim problematizes urban ecologies, how we assume parks should look and what we think they should include. The lion-head wall mounted water fountain declares this a decadent site. Miniature topiary azaleas and other rare plants fill the flower beds. Kim turns the soil in a proposal that we re-think place. Installing *Trailer Park* in Lt. Petrosino Square asks the public to think about what they expect from an urban park, and how they understand the landscape and our access to it. *Trailer Park* makes me think about place, whether it is actually literally grounded, and whether it needs to remain *in situ*.

Best,
Linda

Kim: Hi all. I think I was avoiding the typology conversation because I felt intimidated by taking this on. You see, all I can think of is the irony I am trying to draw out of the typology of trailer culture in my work. Meaning, well, in order to explain I think I have to tell a short personal story. My first three years were spent in a trailer, more or less. What I remember about it was that it was the happiest time in my life. I always knew where my parents were, could almost always see them. We were all together, and this made me very happy. I knew nothing of how living in trailers was considered. When we left that trailer, all hell broke loose, and my life was shattered. So when I think of trailers, I think of an idyllic perfect place where all is safe and warm and well, "englobed" in safety as Marie wonderfully coined it. Basically the exact OPPOSITE of what really is. Real trailer parks are hell, unsafe, can be criminally laden, unclear, hopeless, broken, destitute, less-than the absolute lowest common denominator of living. "If" I can call it that. I'm from Florida, this is my license to speak with authority about trailer parks without apology. Perhaps only a covered wagon is "lower" living than a trailer park, after that I guess comes homelessness. In short, "Trailer" has become synonymous with "Trash". It is now one. But what I've done is inverted it.

I reinvented what it is by simply using the literal definition of "what it is." Is this redefinition? Yes, though I did this as a critical statement, I also did this because my association doesn't fit with what "really is." I found the sublime in the mundane. And this is ironic to me.

When we left the trailer, we went to a huge house in the posh suburbs, and the living that I did there was the lowest trash living I could have imagined. I felt as though I was living like an animal, no, less than an animal, and it made me continuously ashamed of my life and my life-style, ironically enough. When I see a trailer, I think of something completely different than what other people see. I have created what I see, what I feel, a portable enclosed Utopia, as simple as that, as simple as my memory and my associations.

Materially, I used only the best materials, instead of the shittiest which is normally the case inside a travel trailer. The trailer I got was not in great condition, there wouldn't be a way to call it a "luxury" trailer. It was on the lower-end of the trailer spectrum, but now it is in its own, new league. Some of the plants I used are extremely expensive and would be used only in parks of the highest design caliber. I have also used miniature topiary which are, again, very expensive, and indicative of a higher level of horticulture. My wall fountain is classical and references something "refined." Even the exterior metal, the lowest quality metal there is, aluminum, I treated as if it were platinum, working it and reworking it, trying to make it better than it actually is. In doing this am I infusing the metal with another mode of being or being seen? Can you make something precious out of itself when no one expects it is possible, when it is, in point of fact, *not*? If you work hard enough can you literally change something's classification?

Thank you all for this amazing conversation and the opportunity to think more in-depth about what I am doing, what we are all doing and why! — Kim

Thursday, JUNE 1st, 2006

Marie: In what Kim says, one proposal I have for the word she was looking for would be LOST. This can apply to Linda's lost past or memories (& more concretely, carpets). It applies to Kim's as her tamed garden within the trailer has the quality of a lost Eden. As for my photographs, most of the trailers do seem lost in a wide empty (ominous or protective, but still empty) landscape.

Now concerning the typology, yes the word scares me as Yasmeen very well perceived it. Probably because I associate it with something that is selective/eugenic/"mass people"/anti-individual. But typologies CAN be used counter-wise, like the German photographers Hans and Hilja Becher did: a typology of houses, water towers, etc., showing how they are seemingly all the same THOUGH, when you look closer, they really are totally unique and different. This can apply to my work in the sense that I am trying to talk about a type, the nomadic dwelling, and show through photographs how unique, different, poetic, humanized, individualized and special each "home" is. Similarly, from afar, Linda's carpets could seem to have a repeated pattern throughout, a typology reproduced along the carpet. HOWEVER, when you take the time and effort to come closer, you realize the differences, the uniqueness, the details, and the precision that makes each little mini-sculpture unique. Yet another lesson about not "typologizing" things too quickly/at first glance...

Now, to answer Yasmeen's trail of thought: the dictionary defines it as a: "study of, or analysis, or classification based on types or categories." In my case, I would keep this as a "study of." I don't think I'm reaching the "analysis" stage yet, and I don't like "classification" as my whole goal is to speak against putting things/people/lifestyle in cases (even though trailers look like little cases!) Kim, maybe, is more analytical, as she cuts, separates, isolates and recreates the outdoors inside.

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I hope this makes sense, it's late...

Yasmeen: Linda, you have done exactly what I had hoped would begin to occur. I'm curious to know if and how each of you understands and would define a typology. Marie was uncomfortable with the term in a way I find intriguing. It is an idea she wants to resist but it informs her approach. I believe typologies can be antagonistic in the most fruitful way: a form or structure, an established pattern that provides a system that is functional but can also be responded to and reconfigured to provoke questions. I firmly believe in structure as a beginning point that can be fractured and reconfigured. The structure, for me, remains foundational.

I'd like to extend this conversation until Saturday. I think Linda and Marie have tapped into some powerful ideas and interpretations that I am sure will help this thinking through the stakes in describing a contemporary nomadic typology. But before we begin that conversation, I would like this conversation about typologies to move to issues of a poetic nature. The materiality and formations of all three of your work has been described and analyzed in conceptual terms. Now, what I would like to further pursue is

1) how you would define typology

2) what happens at the intersection of structure/form/typology and your material choices.

Linda: Marie, I see how your work reconfigures the typology of straight documentary photography. The information you give us provides us with a sense of the uniqueness of each dwelling within the series. I think you hit the nail right on the head as to my work. There is the tension between the handmade and the mechanical within the making of the objects that belies a sense of typology; overall, as well, I toy with patterns and compositions as I overlap a city grid over traditional carpet patterns.

I am not sure how typology plays into Kim's work though. Obviously, she is reconfiguring the traditional use of the RV, bringing the outdoors indoors, turning a recreational vehicle into a conceptual object as well as an educational tool. But how does the idea of types or categories (plural) play into the work. Kim, do you have any thoughts? Do you think your typology deals with American lifestyles associated with the mobile home, leisurely living? I am not sure how to take this to a poetic level as well. Am I taking your questions too literally, Yasmeen?

Yasmeen: Not at all. This is exactly where I want to run with this conversation. The poet. I want to look closely at the ways each of you subvert a typology—photographic representations of nomadic structures, the carpet, and the mobile trailer home, the park. Each of you has begun with a form that has a rich, charged and provocative history—and you are reconfiguring those histories in extremely compelling ways, which is what I am curious about. How do you do it on a material level? I would like to delve in into your choices of materials and the implications of putting them together (i.e. clay or hot glue and topographical, axonometric maps; the camera, print, its size, even its frame, and the landscape and nomadic structures; plants, water, brick, mobile trailer). Why these specific choices?

A few things come to mind: the idea of movement—more than trailing, a wandering that is in tune with nature, a search for greener pastures, the utopian dream as we've mentioned; and for me a con-